

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 13, 2014

Chairman Tom Wheeler
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Wheeler:

We are writing in a bipartisan manner to urge swift action to modernize the E-Rate program in order to deliver sufficient broadband to every school, classroom, and library.

Taking advantage of cutting-edge technologies to improve the way educators teach and students learn has always been a widely-supported endeavor, as has the E-Rate program itself. However, it's now time that we give E-Rate an upgrade – and modernize this successful 18-year-old program for the broadband era.

While broadband is poised to unlock digital learning's potential, too many of our children are left trying to access the tools of tomorrow using the Internet speeds of the past. The typical K-12 school has about the same Internet access speed as the average home –only with 200 times more users. This means that 40 million students are being left behind without the speeds they need to take full advantage of digital learning opportunities.

High-speed broadband can help us better educate, better innovate, and better compete in the world. It can help us prepare our kids for the jobs of the future and provide our current workforce with skills needed to succeed today. Broadband also fosters a domestic educational technology industry that creates new jobs, and helps the nation become more competitive on the world stage. In fact, a poll released by the bipartisan LEAD Commission found that over 80 percent of Americans are very concerned about the lack of basic technology access in the classroom, and 6 in 10 believe allowing educators to incorporate technology to teach students the skills needed for 21st century jobs is a very important reason to expand high-speed broadband access.

To bring our students up to speed, it's clear we need to keep pace with the growing potential of today's digital learning technologies. That is why we believe it's imperative that the Commission acts expeditiously to modernize, expand, and strengthen the successful E-Rate program by:

- 1) Simplifying the application process, while increasing transparency and accountability and helping improve efficiency.
- 2) Focusing the E-Rate program on broadband infrastructure to help ensure that we maximize the impact of the E-Rate on connectivity to support student learning for all.
- 3) Investing in upgrades that enable every school and library to benefit from high speed broadband options that allow these institutions, rural, urban and suburban, to meet the connectivity goals that their kids need.

By modernizing and strengthening the E-Rate program, we can help empower all students to continually benefit from the latest technological innovations not just for the next semester, or next school year, but for the next generation of learners.

Extending high-speed access to our schools and libraries is more than just an education issue. It impacts our communities, our businesses, and the competitiveness of our nation. In an era when more and more jobs require you to be wired to get hired, let's ensure that every child has the skills needed for the knowledge economy. To bring about this brighter future, we ask you to take swift action to update and expand the E-Rate program to bring high-speed broadband and transformative learning opportunities to every school and library in America.

Sincerely,



Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



Johnny Isakson
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator

cc:

Commissioner Clyburn
Commissioner O'Rielly
Commissioner Rosenworcel
Commissioner Pai



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

July 25, 2014

The Honorable Michael Bennet
United States Senate
458 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Bennet:

Thank you for sharing your views on the importance of modernizing the E-rate program to provide high-speed broadband to and within all of our nation's schools and libraries. Your views are very important and will be included in the record of the proceeding and considered as part of the Commission's review.

Since its creation as part of the 1996 Telecommunications Act, the E-rate program has provided crucial support to meet the connectivity needs of schools and libraries. But just as technology and teaching have evolved over the past two decades, so, too, must E-rate. The tools that supported the educational needs of the Class of 1998 bear virtually no resemblance to those the Classes of 2015 and beyond need to succeed in the 21st century.

As part of the Commission's E-rate modernization effort, I am committed to ensuring that the E-rate program evolves to focus on providing support for the high-speed broadband both to and within schools and libraries. Schools need this broadband to take advantage of digital learning technologies, and libraries need to provide their patrons with high-speed access to the Internet. As you note in your letter, "we need to keep pace with the growing potential of today's digital learning technologies." I could not agree more.

The *Order* adopted by the Commission at our July Open Meeting takes significant steps to modernize the E-rate program by addressing the Wi-Fi gap in America's schools and libraries. We established an annual funding target of \$1 billion for Wi-Fi and a more fair method for distributing funds so that *all* schools and libraries can benefit, including far more rural schools and libraries than in the past. Given that 40 percent of classrooms are not currently Wi-Fi-enabled, and nearly two-thirds of schools indicate that they do not have sufficient Wi-Fi capacity to meet their digital learning needs, it is critically important that we focus our limited program resources on connectivity, not just *to* the school or library, but to the student or library patron. The *Order* funds this support for Wi-Fi through the combination of funds already available for this purpose and by utilizing savings associated with transitioning support from non-broadband services to broadband. At the same time, the *Order* ensures that adequate funding will also be available for broadband connectivity to schools and libraries and seeks further comment on the long-term funding needs of the program.

Your letter also emphasizes the importance of transparency and accountability. I am happy to report that, to make E-rate dollars go even further, the *Order* adopts transparency measures to provide applicants with the pricing and connectivity data needed to make smart purchasing decisions, encourages consortia purchasing to drive down prices, and ensures that applicants are selecting from the best possible bids through the lowest corresponding price rule.

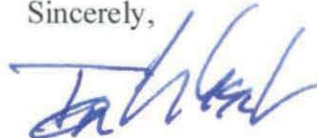
Finally, consistent with the priorities set forth in your letter, the *Order* makes several changes to help make the E-rate processes faster, simpler, and more efficient for all stakeholders. It streamlines the application process by simplifying review of multi-year contracts, expediting small dollar, cost-effective applications, speeding review of all applications, requiring electronic filing, and enabling direct connections between schools and libraries.

The *Order* is a common sense, responsible step in the E-rate modernization process. We are targeting already available funds to meet the greatest current needs, we are getting as much as we can out of every E-rate dollar, and we are formally and expeditiously investigating the appropriate funding level for this program, based upon the steps we have taken to improve its structure and administration. But there is still more work to do.

E-rate modernization is one of the most important issues before the Commission today. We have an opportunity to make a real difference in the lives of millions of students. I look forward to working with you and your colleagues toward our mutual goal of increased access to high-speed broadband in our nation's schools and libraries.

Thank you again for your interest in this important matter. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further concerns.

Sincerely,



Tom Wheeler



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

July 25, 2014

The Honorable Johnny Isakson
United States Senate
131 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Isakson:

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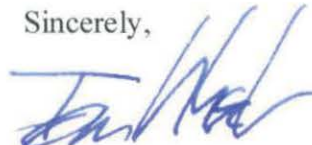
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Thank you again for your interest in this important matter. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further concerns.

Sincerely,



Tom Wheeler



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

July 25, 2014

The Honorable Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senate
188 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator King:

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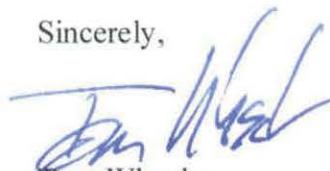
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Tom Wheeler